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SUBJECT: SHIA ISLAMIST COALITION APPEARS SEALED AS
NEGOTIATIONS HEAD INTO FINAL NIGHT

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires David Satterfield.
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Shia leaders have reportedly formed a grand coalition but remained holed up in negotiations on the evening before the October 28 election registration deadline. The Sadrism trend has reportedly significantly expanded its clout in the coalition, as has the Badr Organization. There is still no clear consensus on the coalition's preferred candidate for prime minister and one may not emerge until after the elections. Disagreements over candidates and placement on the lists could yet undo the agreement, but most leaders appeared confident of its prospects heading into the evening. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Shia coalition spokesman Abbas al-Bayati, leader of the Islamic Turkmen Union, told al-Jazeera October 27 that a final compromise had given Sadrists a larger voice in the coalition and sealed their participation in a joint slate. Sadrism TNA member Baha al-Araji confirmed this decision publicly. The list brings together the Sadrists, SCIRI, Da'wa Party, Fadila (Islamic Virtue) Party, and a host of independents and smaller entities.

13. (C) Other contacts indicate that the broad outline of the coalition has been settled even as the meetings continue over individual names. Deputy President Adel Abdel Mehdi told Charge midday October 27 that Muqtada Sadr had agreed to sign a common policy platform with the other Shia Islamist parties. He acknowledged that candidate names still had to be sorted out for each province. Hasan Tu'ma, a Sadrism parliamentarian negotiating on behalf of Muqtada, told PolFSN on October 27 that Muqtada would receive 20 names nationwide. However, independent Shia Islamist parliamentarian Salama al-Khafaji told PolFSN that final candidate lists would put the Sadrists on par with SCIRI, with some 30 candidates each. Meanwhile the Da'wa Party will receive 29 slots, a step below its proportional representation in the last elections. Even as the parties hammer out their final candidate lists, there does not appear to be a consensus over the coalition's pick for prime minister. SCIRI is promoting Adil Abd al-Mehdi, while Da'wa is pushing Ibrahim al-Ja'afari. (Ahmad Chalabi has not yet officially signed on with the coalition and as of midday October 27 was still carefully trying to arrange his own coalition, perhaps with Sadrists himself.) Meanwhile, Fadila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri is also reportedly pushing for guarantees of a senior minister, Deputy Prime Minister, or Vice President slot.

14. (C) COMMENT: The negotiations seem to have led to the rise of some of the most troublesome elements of the Shia slate. The Badr Organization is reportedly achieving stronger representation and the Sadrists are in ascendance as the leading Shia party in Iraq. Some politicians who call themselves Sadrists may yet attempt to run a separate slate alongside the coalition to blur their place in the political process. In any event, the rise of another Shia coalition will likely push Sunni Arabs and Kurds to reinforce their own communities' lists. We will have a clearer picture on the exact shape of the list when the coalition formally registers on October 28.

Satterfield